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SUBJECT: BAN CONVENES THE TENTH BURMA GROUP OF FRIENDS
MEETING

REF: USUN 670

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11. (SBU) Summary. On August 5, Secretary-General Ban convened the tenth meeting of the Group of Friends of Burma to report on his meeting with Burmese Permanent Representative Swe and to seek support for a unified public message from the group on the need for Burmese authorities to respond to the SYG's recommendations. Ban delivered this message to the press after the meeting. He also repeated his intention to convene a high-level Friends meeting on the margins of the UN General Assembly. Friends expressed unanimous support for Ban and his good offices mission. Most also supported a unified message presented by Ban to the press, though the Chinese urged Ban to avoid reference to "one person." Upcoming elections were a common theme, with the clear majority of Friends calling for the release of political prisoners, including Aung Sun Suu Kyi (ASSK), to ensure free and fair elections. There was some discussion about ASSK's trial and the UK and France repeated their call for a clear response to a "guilty" verdict. Sweden, on behalf of the EU, said they were prepared to tighten sanctions should ASSK be found guilty.

12. (SBU) Secretary-General Ban told the Group of Friends that during his June 30 meeting with Burmese Permanent Representative Swe, he reiterated the international community's expression of concern over ASSK's trial, noting that the authorities should carefully consider both the consequences of a "guilty" verdict and ASSK's release. He said that there were "big expectations" from the international community for timely follow up to his requests, including the release of all political prisoners. Ban said that Swe returned to him later that evening, after having delivered Ban's message to the authorities, to inform him that the verdict would be postponed (until August 11). Ban said the Friends should use the Friends meeting as an opportunity to send a unified message to the Burmese to respond to the recommendations he outlined during his visit. He sought the group's approval to make a press statement to this effect after the meeting. Ban told the group that its continued support is "critically important" as the situation in Burma would likely become "increasingly fluid and complicated" with elections approaching and the country striving to transition to a democratic government and provide its people with basic needs. Ban said that he intends to convene a high-level meeting of the Group of Friends on the margins of the upcoming UNGA.

13. (SBU) Special Advisor Gambari admitted that "not much had happened" since Ban's briefing in the Council. He acknowledged the broad support from G8 leaders, ASEAN foreign ministers and others. Through reports from the UN Resident Coordinator, who was allowed to attend ASSK's trial on Friday, July 31, he noted ASSK's appreciation for the

international community's support regardless of the verdict. With regard to progress, Gambari said that he'd received a letter from the Economic Minister that outlined the Burmese intention to "consider how to proceed" with the National Economic Forum in response to Gambari's March 2009 proposal.

P-5 Reactions

¶4. (SBU) All members of the Friends expressed support for Ban and the good offices mission. The P-3 noted with concern the lack of Burmese response to Ban's recommendations to the authorities. PolCouns reminded the group that the Burmese had not made any progress on areas they identified during the recent Council meeting on Burma, including amnesty for prisoners and cooperation with the UN on agriculture and technical assistance for elections. She urged the group to press the generals to cooperate with the SYG's recommendations. On ASSK's trial, the UK and French DPRs called for a "clear response" to a "guilty" verdict. Chinese DPR Liu challenged the need for Ban to brief the press after the meeting, claiming that the "issue is not new and (Ban's) response is not new." He said that the situation in Burma is not about "one person" and a statement about "one person" would be counterproductive. Russian DPR Scherbak noted that the approach to resolving the situation should be "guided by restraint."

Asian Perspective

¶5. (SBU) The new Thai PR Sinhaseni said that Burma needs to respond to the international community's and the SYG's recommendations, including the release of ASSK and all political prisoners, which is the only way to ensure free and fair elections. Singapore PR Menon said that without ASSK's participation, elections would not be legitimate. He noted

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that Former PM Goh recently traveled to Burma and reminded leaders that they have the ability to commute ASSK's sentence. Both Menon and Vietnamese PR Minh encouraged the group to respect the independent judicial process and avoid prejudging the outcome. Indonesian PR Natalegawa reviewed bilateral efforts to call on the Burmese to ensure free and fair elections and release all political prisoners, including ASSK. The Japanese encouraged continued engagement and said that the international community has to respond positively if the country takes positive steps. Indian DPR Singh said that India does not share the "sense of despondency" in the group and that the international community should work with Burma as friends, not critics. He said that India sees "hope and flexibility" in the country and would "like to allow it to play out." ROK PR Park expressed support for Ban's efforts.

EU and Others

¶6. (SBU) Swedish PR Liden, on behalf of the EU, commented that if the trial is not fair, it would be hard to believe elections could be free and fair. He added that the EU is prepared to tighten sanctions should ASSK be found "guilty." Liden said the EU hoped the Burmese would respond positively to the SYG's recommendations, but noted that Burmese authorities "make it tough" for the EU to engage positively. Australian PR Quinlin said that Australia remained concerned at the lack of Burmese response to the SYG's recommendations. He said Australia is focused on the "total question" of Burma but added that the outcome of ASSK's trial has to be taken into account and Australia is prepared to take a clear position on the verdict.

SYG Briefs the Press

¶7. (SBU) After the meeting, Ban briefed the press on his meeting with Burmese PR Swe and said that support from the Friends as well as international support confirmed the interest of the international community to see a timely response from the Burmese on "our recommendations" that he

conveyed to the Burmese during his recent trip. He also said that the Friends meeting confirmed international support for his engagement to help the Government of Burma address its many challenges. Finally, he said the Friends agreed to a high-level meeting on the margins of the UNGA.

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